Faith & Inspiration

Past Imperfect

By Vincent Mashburn

The past can certainly have a significant impact on the present and even future. Any student of history understands that antecedent events often establish a precedent upon which current events will proceed to unfold. With regard to interactions among people, we will often base our reactions, responses, and ability to accommodate others on the exchanges or outcomes that have occurred previously between us.

An individual's past can often inform — rightly or not — others' opinions, expectations, and attitudes towards that person. On the one hand, this can be practical and unavoidable, since it may be essential in establishing a baseline for the degree of confidence or reliance we should exercise. In job interviews, we are asked about past experience and performance. In legal proceedings, we may be required to testify or produce evidence regarding prior conduct. Insurance companies are customarily interested in driving records and claims histories.

On the other hand, questionable aspects of a person's past may not fully reflect that individual's maturity and growth in life. Previous modes of thought and behavior do not necessarily indicate present or future beliefs and actions. Indeed, part of the premise of redemption through Jesus's atoning act is that true repentance and acceptance of the forgiveness offered by divine compassion induces a change of heart and mind towards Godly concerns and passions.

As believers, we understand not only the extraordinary power of absolution, but also the reality of renewal and redemption. The Scriptures describe our life in Christ in such dynamic terms: "born again"; "new creation"; "new self"; "newness of life"; "transformed by the renewing of your mind"; "new heart and spirit" (Ezekiel 36:26; John 3:3; Romans 6:4; Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:24; 1 Peter 1:23). An essential element of this theme of rebirth and regeneration is a kind of acquittal from past transgressions. While we may certainly still be constrained to face or endure the consequences of our former life and deeds, our relationship with God and with others can be restored and revitalized thanks to the unmerited grace with which we have been bestowed.

The Bible insists that God not only forgives our sin, but that he "forgets" — that is, he does not hold it against us when we exhibit genuine repentance (Psalm 103:11-12; Isaiah 43:25; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Hebrews 8:12, 10:17). Obviously, God is not capable of actually forgetting anything, but rather he chooses to regard our belief and acceptance of salvation through Jesus as superseding our sin. The life that Jesus gave as remission for the penalty of sin makes it possible for God to regain fellowship with us even though he remains holy and righteous, while we are inherently not. He is able to do so not by condoning or merely overlooking our sin, but rather by choosing to not define us by our sinful nature. In the sanctuary of Jesus's sacrifice, God can perceive us as valued individuals with ongoing potential for growing into meaningful, authentic, constructive living beings.

In a couple of somewhat related episodes of the "Star Trek: Deep Space 9" television series, the captivating and endearing friendship between Odo, the titular space station's chief of security, and Kira Nerys, liaison officer for the people of the nearby planet Bajor, is explored and tested to varying degrees. While they each possess significantly different backgrounds and experiences and represent a remarkable diversity of sentient species, they come to find that they do have some common concerns and ambitions.

Though they manage to forge a strong and substantial affinity and even devotion to one another throughout the series, like anyone who engages in long-term relationship building, they periodically find themselves obliged to recognize and ponder the fallout of past decisions and actions. At times, they are even compelled to consider the quality of character of one another.

In one episode, Odo's criminal investigation of an incident aboard the station uncovers Kira's potential complicity in an old case which involved a murder. Despite her emphatic and persistent denials at the time, Kira comes to reveal that she was, in fact, guilty of the prior crime, committed under duress and with no practical or reasonable alternative, according to her. Naturally, Odo is disappointed.

ODO: You've had all that time to tell me the truth.

KIRA: I tried to tell you the truth a hundred times. What you think of me matters a lot. I was afraid.

ODO: That it might affect our friendship? Maybe it doesn't have to.

KIRA: Will you ever be able to trust me the same way again?

Odo finds his dedication to his strict sense of justice in conflict with his growing admiration and fondness for Kira.

In a later episode, it is discovered that during the erstwhile period when the Cardassians — perpetual nemeses of the Bajorans — governed this sector of space including the Deep Space 9 station, Odo failed to intervene in the execution of three innocent Bajoran men accused of a terrorist act. Although he was aware that there was only the most dubious circumstantial evidence against them, Odo ultimately submitted to his sense of responsibility to the law, despite the fact that Cardassian law provides no recourse whatsoever for the accused. He has lived with the guilt and regret of his callous negligence and blind adherence to duty up to now. Kira confronts Odo to express her understandable turmoil.

KIRA: I still don't know what to think.

ODO: I'm guilty. What more is there to say?

KIRA: Maybe nothing. Maybe a lot. I believed in you. A lot of people did. You were special. You were the one man who stood apart from everyone else, the one man who stood for justice. Now what?

ODO: Now I'm just another imperfect [being].

In as much as interpersonal relationships can be rather complex or complicated, we may sometimes face the challenge of confronting the burden of the past — others' or our own — and contending with how that might affect or even alter existing relationships. Exposing the hidden truths of our past can certainly be difficult, uncomfortable, embarrassing, or problematic, potentially jeopardizing the bonds we may have established with someone.

But like God, we can choose to not define a person by the failures or offenses of their past but rather to seek and support opportunities to manifest forgiveness and repentance. This is not to say that the past is irrelevant or has no value.

As the apostle Paul implies, we should allow the past to motivate us towards a better future in which we are striving to become what God intended (Philippians 3:13-14). The past can hold the lessons we have learned that, with wisdom gained, should refine and illuminate our view of the present and future. For believers, while the past may be imperfect, the present must be patient for a future that is flawless.

Obituary

Carla Cook

Carla Joyce Hobson Cook, age 97, of Seneca , South Carolina, passed away peacefully on May 6, 2025.

She was born to Joseph Carl and Sada Mae Hobson on January 1, 1928, in Homestead, Florida, where she proudly resided for 75 years.

Carla is survived by her children: Gail Lipton, Gary Atkinson, Glenn Atkinson (Mollee), Vicki Wiedinger (Don), 10 grandchildren, 10 great grandchildren, and one great-great grandson.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Willis King Metheny; husband, Victor Stanley Cook; and son, Jack Stanley Cook. She was also predeceased by her brother, Willard Hendershott; and beloved granddaughter, Amee Atkinson.

Carla was a devoted animal lover and supporter of many animal causes. She was an avid fan of all sports, and especially loved watching the Miami Dolphins. As a teenager, she performed her patriotic duty as a civil defense aircraft spotter, during WW2.

Graveside services will be held in Miami, Florida at a later date.

To submit an obituary or death notice, email wording and jpg photo to Info@NewsLeaderMail.com, or call 305-245-2311. Print deadline is Wednesday at noon.

Lifestyle

Special Women are Veterans Too Summit

By Charlie Hudson

In closing out Military Appreciation Month and Memorial Day in May, followed soon after by remembrances of D-Day on June 6, 1944, there is a lesser-known date dedicated to female veterans.

On June 12, 1948, President Harry Truman officially signed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act to formalize what had been proven for decades.

Before the act, and despite the fact that many women had served in military positions during various conflicts, women other than nurses were considered only temporarily essential in times of crisis. With more than 140,000 women "essential" during World War II, the 1948 act permanently authorized the Women's Army Corps (WAC). Other services followed later, and in 1978, the separate female service organizations were transitioned into the regular Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard.

Since the integration, women now comprise almost eighteen percent of the U.S. military, and many positions once closed to them are open.

Not surprisingly, women's veterans groups have also emerged, and in 2018, Army veteran Julie Robinson established the South Dade Women Veterans Alliance (SDWVA). The multi-service organization "is dedicated to advocating for the needs and interests of women veterans in the community. Through various programs, events, and outreach efforts, the Alliance seeks to empower women who have served in the military and promote their well-being and success."

Robinson has forged alliances throughout Miami-Dade and beyond, hosting two major events each year to highlight women veterans. This year, SDWVA is partnering with the Miami-Dade Beacon Council to host the "Women Are Veterans Too" Summit on Thursday, June 12, 2025, from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at Homestead City Hall, 100 Civic Court, Homestead.

A recent press release provided details.

"The South Dade Women Veteran's Alliance, in partnership with the Miami-Dade Beacon Council, is proud to announce that this impactful event will honor the service and contributions of women veterans while providing a platform for education, empowerment, employment, and community engagement.

The summit will feature a lineup of distinguished speakers, including veteran advocates, community leaders, and inspiring women who have served in the armed forces. Attendees will have the opportunity to participate in informative sessions, visit vendor booths, and engage in a powerful tribute ceremony honoring 50 remarkable women veterans from throughout Miami-Dade County."

The press release included quotes from both organizations.

"We are excited to bring together veterans, their families, and the community to recognize and celebrate the invaluable contributions of women in the military," said Julie Robison, founder of the South Dade Women Veteran's Alliance. "This summit aims to empower women veterans and raise awareness about the unique challenges they face while also fostering connections within the community."

"Women veterans are the fastest-growing segment of the veteran population and a powerful force in shaping our region's economic future," said Dr. Paula Hopkins, Executive Vice President, Strategic Partnerships & Funding, at the Miami-Dade Beacon Council.

Local businesses and non-profit organizations will also be on hand to "showcase products and services that support veterans and their families, promoting an inclusive and supportive environment."

Registration for the summit is now open. Attendees are encouraged to register early to secure their spot.

For more information and to register, please visit www.sdwva.org.

Marching to Success: Student's Path in Music and Medicine

Valerie Velasquez - Top Student at South Dade High. David Volz

By: David Volz

Valerie Velasquez is a leading senior at South Dade Senior High School.

She will graduate with a 4.8 grade point average, ranking in the top three percent of the class of 2025, and enroll at FAMU in the fall, where she plans to pursue a career in medicine. Her goal is to become a cardiologist.

At South Dade, Velasquez was a drum major in the marching band. She plays the clarinet, saxophone, and other instruments. She competed on the Bucs' track team and achieved success in the 100-meter hurdles, 100, 200, and 400-meter runs. Velasquez has been a member of the National Honor Society, the Art Honor Society, and the National Honor Society.

She has also earned certifications in CPR and EKG. In addition to becoming a certified medical assistant. Velasquez earned an Associate Arts degree from Miami-Dade College.

"I love to help people and want to pursue a career as a cardiologist," she said.

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